

## Message Text

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ACTION DHA-02

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 1129

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: SHUM, DM, US  
SUBJECT: BENINESE FOREIGN MINISTER'S COMMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: A. STATE 148759, B. STATE 117008

SUMMARY: BENIN'S FOREIGN MINISTER DISTRESSED OVER US ABSTENTION ON INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION LOAN TO BENIN. HE STATED THAT GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO IMPROVING HUMAN RIGHTS AND EXPRESSED PLEASURE THAT US AWARE OF EFFORTS TO PROMULGATE NEW CONSTITUTION. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING MEETING WITH BENINESE FOREIGN MINISTER ALLADAYE JULY 1, HE RAISED QUESTION OF US ABSTENTION ON DEVELOPMENT LOANS TO BENIN. ALLADAYE SAID HE WAS "VERY DISTRESSED" (TRES PEINE) THAT THE UNITED STATES HAD SINGLED OUT BENIN FOR PUNISHMENT. HE SAID THAT HE REALIZED THAT AN AMERICAN CITIZEN HAD BEEN IMPRISONED BY BENINESE SECURITY FORCES, BUT THAT A SINGLE INCIDENT BY AN OVER-ZEALOUS POLICE FORCE IN TIME OF EMERGENCY SHOULD NOT BE THE BASIS FOR TAKING SUCH A DRASTIC STEP. ALLADAYE THEN REITERATED THE PROBLEMS WHICH FACED BENIN IN TRYING TO UNIFY THE COUNTRY THROUGH THE REVOLUTION, THE ATTEMPTS OF FORMER POLITICIANS TO SABOTAGE THE REGIME, THE MERCENARY ATTACK AND THE THREAT THAT BENIN STILL FEELS IT FACES FROM DAHOMEANS ABROAD. HE SAID THE REASON THE AMERICAN CITIZEN HAD BEEN  
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ARRESTED WAS THAT THE BENINESE HAD HAD INFORMATION THAT SOME OF THE MEN WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE MERCENARY ATTACK HAD COME TO BENIN IN THE FALL OF 1976 ON A RECONNAISSANCE MISSION. AFTER THE JANUARY 16 ATTACK THE SECURITY FORCES HAD BECOME SO SENSITIVE THAT MANY INNOCENT FOREIGN NATIONALS WERE ARRESTED. THE GOVERNMENT REGRETTED THESE ARRESTS, BUT COULD DO LITTLE AFTER THE FACT. ALLADAYE SAID THAT NOW THE ATMOSPHERE HAS

BECOME MORE RELAXED, BUT THAT BENIN MUST REMAIN VIGILANT. HE REPEATED HOW DISTRESSED HE WAS THAT THE US SHOULD CONSIDER BENIN TO BE IN VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. "AFTER ALL," HE SAID, "WE HAVE NEVER KILLED ANYONE. WE ARE NOT A VIOLENT PEOPLE. ON THE CONTRARY, WE WISH TO LIVE IN PEACE." HE STRESSED THAT BENIN WAS COMMITTED TO PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS. THAT WAS THE ULTIMATE AIM OF THE REVOLUTION.

2. IN RESPONSE, I NOTED THAT CRITICISM OF BENIN'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD WENT BEYOND THE ARREST OF MR. NAKADA. WE WERE NOT SPEAKING OF AN ISOLATED INCIDENT, BUT OF THE SUSPENSION OF THE CONSTITUTION, THE WAVE OF ARBITRARY ARRESTS AFTER THE MERCENARY ATTACK, AND OF THE ABSENCE OF GUARANTEES OF HUMAN RIGHTS. FOR THIS REASON OUR REPRESENTATIVE HAD ABSTAINED ON THE IDA LOAN. I NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNMENT TO PROMULGATE A NEW DRAFT CONSTITUTION HAD RECEIVED A FAVORABLE REACTION IN WASHINGTON AND THAT WE WERE FOLLOWING ITS DEVELOPMENT WITH GREAT INTEREST. CONSEQUENTLY OUR REPRESENTATIVE AT THE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT FUND HAD VOTED IN FAVOR OF THE PROPOSED AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK \$5.5 MILLION LOAN TO BENIN FOR RURAL HEALTH STUDIES (REF A). ALLADAYE EXPRESSED HIS SATISFACTION THAT THE US WAS NOT ONLY LOOKING FOR NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN BENIN. WHEN I ENQUIRED WHETHER ALLADAYE THOUGHT THAT THE FINAL VERSION OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION WOULD EMERGE IN APPROXIMATELY THE SAME FORM AS THE DRAFT NOW CIRCULATING, HE REPLIED THAT THE SERIES OF VILLAGE MEETINGS

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WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY PRODUCE SOME SMALL CHANGES, BUT THE ESSENTIAL GUARANTEES AFFECTING HUMAN RIGHTS WOULD REMAIN.

3. SINCE THE MEETING WAS VERY RELAXED -- IT TOOK PLACE IN THE EVENING AT ALLADAYE'S OFFICE -- I SUGGESTED TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER THAT ONE REASON THAT BENIN HAD A POOR IMAGE IN MANY WESTERN COUNTRIES WAS THAT THE BENINESE GOVERNMENT ITSELF DID LITTLE TO PRESENT ITSELF IN A BETTER LIGHT. SINCE THE EVERY SPEECH MADE BY THE PRESIDENT CONTAINS SOME ANTI-WESTERN INVECTIVE, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THE REACTION IN THE US WAS NEGATIVE. I OBSERVED THAT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION TOOK OFFICE FOUR DAYS AFTER THE MERCENARY ATTACK. THUS, THE FIRST INFORMATION THE NEW ADMINISTRATION HAD ABOUT BENIN WAS OF A WAVE OF ARRESTS, INCLUDING THOSE OF US DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY ANNOUNCEMENT OF TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS, HARDSHIPS SUFFERED BY PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS, DETENTION OF TOURISTS, ETC. IN ADDITION, SPEECHES CALLING FOR THE "LIQUIDATION ON THE SPOT" OF CROOKED BUSINESSMEN (COMMERÇANTS VEREUX) ONLY STRENGTHENED IMPRESSIONS ABROAD THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS USING VERY HARSH MEASURES TO DEAL WITH ITS CITIZENS. I SAID THAT I REALIZED THAT THE SITUATION SEEN FROM WITHIN WAS QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THAT SEEN FROM WITHOUT, YET ONLY BENIN COULD

ITSELF BRING SOME PERSPECTIVE TO THE PICTURE. ALLADAYE REACTED CALMLY, SAYING THAT ONE SHOULD NOT BE MISLED BY RHETORIC INTENDED FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION. HE AGREED, HOWEVER, THAT BENIN HAD NOT TAKEN MUCH OF AN INITIATIVE TO PRESENT ITSELF TO THE REST OF THE WORLD, AND SAID THAT HE WOULD TALK TO AMBASSADOR BOYA, WHO IS IN BENIN IN CONNECTION WITH AN INVESTIGATION OF THE DAMAGES CAUSED BY THE MERCENARY ATTACK, TO SEE IF THERE WAS A MEANS OF MAKING US NEWSPAPERS AWARE OF WHAT WAS ACTUALLY TAKING PLACE IN THE COUNTRY.  
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## Message Attributes

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